

Role of Women in India's Struggle for Freedom



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Abstract

This article deals with the Indian Freedom Struggle and the contribution of Indian women in this war of Independence. The article tells us the participation of women of Punjab in the nationalist movement from 1901-10, 1911-20, 1921-30, 1931-40 and 1941-47. In 1901-10, political upheavals in the province of Bengal affected Punjabi women and few women showed their sympathy with the Bengali individuals. The decade 1911-20 was the most important decade as the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy and therefore the martial law of 1919 acted as a catalyst for making ladies consciousness for fighting for the freedom of India. Then these women victims and alternative sympathetic women directly jumped into the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920. The decade 1921-30, witnessed the direct involvement of girls of Punjab in the freedom struggle and these women came into the contact of M.K. Gandhi. The decade 1931-40 was the period of direct action and women of Punjab region did not sit back at their homes and got active in disobeying the government by following the non-violent ways of Gandhi from 1930-34. The last seven years from 1941 to 47 were those when the women of Punjab province came forward and fought aboard men and suffered the same consequences as the men suffered. These activist ladies were so trapped in this struggle, that they unheeded gender issues or put them aside until independence had been achieved and in the finish in 1947 after the accomplishment of independence, the women of Punjab were given credit to their deeds.

Keywords:

Freedom Struggle, Role of Women, Women and Struggle, Mettle of Women

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The history of Indian Freedom Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and undaunted spirit and long-faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn nation freedom. When most of the women freedom fighters were in jail the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India may be a long one.

Woman's participation in India's freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against British commissioned military officer Malcolm and defeated him in guerrilla warfare. Many women together with Rani Channama of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Awadh fought against British company within the 19th century; thirty years before the "First War of Independence 1857". She was the wife of the deposed ruler of Lucknow who actively took part in the revolt of 1857 against the Doctrine of Lapse under which Dalhousie wanted her to surrender Lucknow. She gave stiff resistance, but after the fall of Lucknow she escaped to Kathmandu. The role played by women within the War of Independence (the great Revolt) of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauhan Rani, Tapasvini Maharani daringly crystal rectifier their troops into the field.

Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi whose valiancy and superb leadership set an

impressive example of real patriotism. She was the second wife of the ruler of Jhansi Raja Gangadhar Rao who protested against the 'Doctrine of Lapse'. She refused to surrender Jhansi and fought bravely attired as a male during the Revolt of 1857 and died in the battle field fighting the British forces. Her courage inspired many Indians to rise against the alien rule. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and liberal families, also as those from the rural areas and from all walk of life, all castes, religions and communities. Sarojini Naidu, Sarojini Naidu holds pride of place among women freedom fighters of India. She was responsible for awakening the women of India. She was first Indian woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1925 at the Kanpur Session. In 1928, she came to the USA with the message of the non- violence movement from Gandhiji. When in 1930, Gandhi was arrested for a protest; Sarojini took the helms of his movement. In 1931, she participated in the Round Table Summit, along with Gandhiji and Pundit Malavyaji. She was also the acting President of the Congress in 1932. In 1942, she was arrested during the 'Quit India' protest and stayed in jail for 21 months. She was a gifted poet of the English language and was popularly known as the *Nightingale of India*. After independence, she became the first ever woman Governor of an Indian State (Uttar Pradesh). Kasturbha Gandhi, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, was one of the foremost supporters of the Gandhi's programmes. One of the first women to be imprisoned in Transvaal, she took part in the Quit India Movement (1942) and was arrested. She died while imprisoned in Poona. Vijay Laxmi Pandit, Jawaharlal

Nehru's sister entered the Non-Cooperation Movement. She was imprisoned thrice in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932, 1941 and 1942. In 1937 she was elected to the Provincial legislature of the United Provinces and was designated minister of local self government and public health. She played an important role as India's representative in San Francisco during the first meeting of the UN where she challenged the might of the British. She was the first woman to become the President of the United Nations General Assembly, and Annie Besant, Irish by birth was a staunch supporter of India's struggle for freedom. She founded the Home Rule League in Madras in 1916. She also founded the *Theosophical Society of India*. She was the President (First Woman President) of Indian National Congress for one term at Calcutta in 1917. She also edited '*New India*' and '*Commonwealth*'. She had done ample work to formulate favourable opinion about the Indian question in outside world. Even today, India remembers with gratefulness Annie Besant's immeasurable work for the freedom struggle, educational advancement and social reforms etc in twentieth century are the names which are remembered even today for their contribution in battlefield and in political field.¹

Similarly, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay² also tried to awaken the entire womanhood

¹ Siddhartha Dash, *Role of Women in India's Struggle for Freedom*, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 75-76.

² Smt Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was elected President of the Youth Congress in December 1929 and appealed to the National Congress leaders to declare Poorna Swaraj as their goal. On January 26, 1930, Kamaladevi captured the imagination of the entire nation when in a scuffle; she clung to the

of the country to come forward to require their place in the society and within the nation as an equal partner of man. She said, "The politics of the nation square measure the supreme need of humanity in its decided to scale the ladder of freedom. No one sex can build up a nation. Woman has her own distinctive contribution to create for the purpose of enriching life so that it should fulfil its own divine mission to perfection, so within the struggle for freedom they're destined to play their legitimate part and bear their share of the responsibility in breaking the chains that weigh heavily on people."

Thus, it is often seen from the above mentioned samples of a few leaders of the 20th century who regarded the co-operation and participation of women within the struggle for freedom important. They encouraged their ladies to affix this struggle in either active or in passive approach. The political leaders, social reformers and alternative activists appealed to the ladies to affix the struggle and knew that without ladies the liberty movement could not be complete. Responding to the calls of native and national leaders, women of different communities and from all walks of life came resolute join the struggle, marches and demonstrations, as constructive workers, participating in and infrequently taking charge of the village reconstruction programmes, as workers within the reason for social, economic justice working for the removal of social evils and alternative sorts of social oppression. The extremely educated and therefore the not so well

Tricolour in order to protect it. Blows rained on her as she stood like a rock to protect the flag, bleeding profusely. She galvanized the All India Women Conference into a dynamic movement.

educated joined hands to spread skill and develop self reliance among the people. Women who had spent their lives behind purdah came out to fight against orthodoxy, superstition and communal separatism.

In the province of Punjab, each national and international politics affected the regional politics of Punjab. Within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the people in Punjab were a lot of familiarised towards the social upliftment of the ladies. As mentioned within the earlier that numerous instructional establishments, widow ashrams and reformatory organisations were opened. Even within the early twenty years of decennary native reformers and leaders were a lot of inclined to reforms and were operating against social customs like feminine infanticide, widowhood, purdah system, sati system, child marriage etc. Thus, feminine education was thought of the most effective medium for women emancipation. Numerous organisations and associations were formed which crystal rectifier the ladies of Punjab to come out of their homes to participate within the public sphere.

'Participation of women within the public life' made them aware about the opposite provinces of India; and events happening in these provinces, and most vital, medium significantly vernacular press play a big role. The appeals of local and national leaders within these problems motivated ladies to participate in the Nationalist struggle. The Nationalist struggle in India against the British colonial rule brought about the political mobilisation of each men and women. It encouraged bourgeois and elite ladies to adopt new models

within the public domain and to engage within the range of activities like social reform spreading the nationalist message and mobilisation for the movement.³ From liberal homes and conservative families, urban centres and rural districts, women-single and married, young and old-came forward and joined the struggle against colonial rule. Women participation known as into question the British right to rule, legitimized the Indian nationalist movement and won for activist ladies, at least for a time, the approval of Indian men. Politics fully altered the goals and activities of the organized ladies. Education, social reform and women rights appealed to some progressive ladies but the movement to free the country of its foreign rulers attracted folks from all classes, communities, and philosophical persuasions.⁴

In the early years of 1900s i.e. from 1901-10, some of the women of Punjab in the main participated within the reformatory works. They started their journals with emphasis on highlighting women problems. Bibi Harnam Kaur together with her husband Bhai Takht Singh opened '*Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya*' in Ferozepur in 1894 and in 1907; this institution started its educational journal '*Punjabi Bhain*'.⁵ Sarla Debi Chaudhurani together with his husband Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhari (an Arya Samaji leader) founded '*Hindu-*

³ Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 40-42.

⁴ Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India: Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p. 121.

⁵ Bhai Suraj Singh, *Sri Mata Bibi Harnam Kaur: Adbhut Jeevan*, Wazir Hind Press, Amritsar, 1908, pp. 26-28.

Sahayak Sabha’ in Lahore in 1906. Later branches of this Sabha were founded in Multan, Jhang, Sialkot, Lyallpur and Gujranwala. The Sabhas were opened to form men and women physically match as they were instructed gymnastic exercise, swordplay, and Gatka fights and other activities. Sarla Debi worked for women education within the villages around Lahore and had larger plans for the education of purdah women. In 1910, she founded Bharat Stree Mahamandal at Allahabad to promote female education and opened its branches at Lahore, Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Midnapore and Calcutta to bring together women of every caste, creed, class and party on the basis of their common interests in the moral and material progress of the women of India for conveyance education to purdah women.⁶

On 16, October 1905, Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal and leaders of Bengal announced that day as ‘*a day of National Mourning.*’ A general hartal was announced in Bengal and other people fasted and went bare foot to take bath

⁶ Sarla Devi Chaudhurani was the founder of the first women organisation in India, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal in Allahabad in 1910. One of the primary goals of the organisation was to promote female education, which at that time was not well developed. The organisation opened several offices in Lahore Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Midnapur and Kolkata to improve the situation of women all over India. In 1904 she opened a swadeshi shop called Lakkhir Bhandar. For her efforts in promoting swadeshi trade, the Indian National Congress gave her a gold medal. Also See J.C. Bagal, *Sarla Devi Chaudhurani, Sahitya Sadhak Charitmalā*, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, 1964, p.70.

within the Ganga.⁷ There Swaraj, Swadeshi and National Education became the slogans of the Nationalist.⁸ Meetings were organized by the women in their streets and spinning wheels were introduced within the Zenana.⁹

The partition of Bengal infused a replacement spirit of loyalty within the women of Punjab and Punjabi nationalists welcomed the Bengali Swadeshi movement, the women in Punjab conjointly stepped into the political arena. Thus, the political incidents happening within the other provinces of India influenced the women of Punjab and provided a fillip to the Swadeshi. 'In Lahore, women organized a girls Section at the Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition of 1909'. Smt. Sushila Devi of Sialkot delivered a series of lectures in which she attacked the government and exhorted the women to rise to the occasion. Har Devi, mate of Roshan Lal, lawyer of Lahore, who was a great social reformer and editor of a Hindi Magazine ‘*The Bharat Bhagini*’, conjointly joined the ranks of the political workers. She organise the meetings and picked up funds for the purpose of helping anarchists under trial. Smt. Purani Devi, an Arya Samaj employee of Hissar toured the various districts of Punjab and advocated the cause of swadeshi.¹⁰ Agyavati of Delhi was conjointly a reformist. She started a *Vidhwa Ashram* wherever widows and

⁷ Bipan Chandra & Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1927, p. 82.

⁸ Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1968, p. 96.

⁹ Sharmila Rege, *Sociology of Gender: The Challenge of Feminist Sociological Knowledge*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 312

¹⁰ Opcit. pp. 98-99.

other women received political training and was to preach while not the distinction of caste and creed.¹¹

All these women helped in current revolutionary leaflets and literature and in maintaining liason between different revolutionary and national leaders. But still the participation of ladies was restricted. There were no women leaders (with the potential exception of Sarladevi), women were not enclosed within the samities or volunteer movements, and the prevailing ideology of the time was still too conservative to allow women to participate on an equal basis with men.¹² Thus, within the first decade from 1901-10, there was a sort of participation of the women in Punjab that was additional or less passive in nature in affairs of state, wherever women were additional involved with women issues and evil customs. Education was foremost on their list, followed by child marriage and the issues of widow's and dowry. The second decade from 1911-20 witnessed many ups and downs within the involvement of ladies within the area of Punjab. The most vital event of the decade was the primary war (1914-18). It brought about crucial changes within the political life and socio-economic conditions of India.¹³ The declaration of war by Great Britain against Federal Republic of Germany in 1914 automatically actor India into its vortex. The Indians had not been consulted either before the declaration of war or before the

government committed the Indian folks and Indian resources to fighting the war primarily for British imperial interests. The contribution of India, although not voluntary, was sizable. More than 10 Lakh Indians were sent to different theatres of war from France to China. One in ten became a casualty the full war expenditure ran to over dollar one hundred and twenty seven million, India's debt augmented by thirty percent and a good part of it had been forced on the people.¹⁴ At the beginning Indian leaders declared their sympathy and support for Great Britain. Numerous Indians were sent to fight for Great Britain. Even the women of Punjab and other provinces were trying to gather money for the war debt. 'In July 1918, women of Sindh and Karachi were trying hard to help the government, a meeting was organised in Karachi by the women and rupees 1, 25,000 were collected and given to the government officials.'¹⁵

During this time some people of Punjab were pro-British and not against the policies of British. One woman of Ludhiana whose husband was a police constable (he was already collaborating in the war), encouraged people of her neck of the woods to recruit in the army for helping nation government. Similarly, in August, 1917, one widow of Ferozepur district voluntarily came out on the call of Lieut Governor for recruiting Punjabis in the army. She needed her son to serve the government. However, throughout this

¹¹ Usha Bala, *Indian Women Freedom Fighters 1857-1947*, Manmohan Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p. 99.

¹² Aparna Basu, *The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom*, Vikas Publishers, New Delhi, 1976, p.8.

¹³ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Press, Madras, 1983, p. 147.

¹⁴ Bipan Chandra & Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1927, p. 108.

¹⁵ Andrew Tait Jarobe, *Soldiers Of Empire Indian Sepoys In And Beyond The Imperial Metropole During The First World War, 1914-1919*, Ph.D Dissertation in Department of History, North-eastern University Boston, Massachusetts, April, 2013.

period from 1914-18, women of Punjab and different provinces were influenced by varied women leaders like Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Madam Bhikaji Cama. These girls spoke in public regarding the free Republic of India. They used to get their articles revealed in vernacular newspapers and journals. *Sughar Saheli*, Amritsar, a journal of Punjab revealed the article of Annie Besant and her self-rule League in the October issue of 1916. 'In that article she encouraged girls to participate against the government and fight for their own Home Rule. Another necessary factor which junction rectifier to the direct and active women participation in Punjab was the entry of Gandhi. 'Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) came back to India in 1915 as the hero of the South African struggle.'¹⁶ It was Gandhi who gave a new direction, strength and inspiration to the freedom movement and actor into it girls in large numbers. With his experience of Republic of South Africa behind him he was tuned in to the potentialities of girls as passive resisters.¹⁷

Thus, in the decade 1911-20, women of Punjab became active participants in the politics. The immediate factor which junction rectifier to this participation was the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy of 1919. From 1914-18, some were either pro British or against British. Entry of Gandhi gave a fillip to this involvement but the Rowlatt Act and the Amritsar massacre set

the stage for the active participation of

¹⁶ Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India: Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p. 124-125.

¹⁷ Aparna Basu, *The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom*, Vikas Publishers, New Delhi, 1976, p. 20.

girls. The Bills known as the Indian Criminal law of 1919 were unjust, subversive of the principles of liberty and justice and harmful of the elementary rights of people on which the protection of community, as a whole and the state itself, was based. The Bill No. II was finally passed on the 18th March 1919 known as the Rowlatt Act. It contained 43 sections and was divided into 5 parts. It was expedient to make provision that the ordinary criminal law was to be supplemented and the emergency powers were exercisable by the government for the purpose of managing anarchic and revolutionary movements. In different words, this act was designed to offer the government power to crush popular liberties, to arrest and detain suspected persons while not showing any cause and warrant to imprison them while not trial.¹⁸

People were against this act and needed the government to re-appeal this act as they had shown loyalty to nation government during the primary warfare. They expected rewards rather than this act. This act was met with the protest all over the state with a popular cry of '*na wakil, na dalil, na appeal*'.¹⁹ In Punjab, protest meetings were control at varied places in the month of February 1919²⁰ against the bills. As a protest, even Gandhi declared the observance of fast, prayer and suspension of all work for sooner or later - the April 6th, 1919. He prompts that the second Sunday after the publication of the

¹⁸ Manju Verma, *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 32.

¹⁹ N.N. Mitra, *The Indian Annual Register*, vol. I, Jan-June 1920, Calcutta, The Annual Register Office, 1920, p. 33.

²⁰ Opcit. p. 33.

governor assents to Bill No. II of 1919 to be ascertained as each day of humiliation and prayer. So on 23 March 1919, Gandhi issued his hartal declaration to observe an All India Hartal Day on 6th April, 1919. He also appealed to the women of India to join this Satyagraha Movement in large numbers and co-operate with the men in the constitutional fight which they were waging against the Rowlatt legislation.²¹

Punjab ascertained complete hartal on 6th April. On it day, the leaders and the people gave the impression to act in complete union. There was complete fraternization between Hindus and Muhammadans. Resolutions were passed all over, protestant against the Rowlatt Act and exigent its repeal.²² Even girls and kids participated in the programme and ascertained fast and recited prayers in their homes. The wives, daughters and sisters of the outstanding Congress leaders also came forward. Smt. Satyawati (wife of Lala Achint Ram of Lahore), Smt. Bhag Devi (wife of Lala Dhuni Chand of Ambala), Smt. Pushpa Gujral (wife of A.N. Gujral of Jhelum) and Smt. Guran Devi (wife of L.C. Dutt of Sialkot). Even the village women of Sanghoi in the Punjab ascertained fast together with their men and admired Mahatma.²³

The 9th April 1919 was the day of Ram Naumi and this Hindu festival was for the most part participated in by Muslims and

²¹ The collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 15, New Delhi, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1964, p. 189.

²² Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab sub-committee of the Indian National Congress, p. 43

²³ Manju Verma, *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 34.

together with the same old shouts and political cries were freely raised “*Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai*”, “*Hindu Musalman Ki Jai*”. On the evening of 9th April, Gandhi who was on his manner from Bombay to Delhi was stopped at a little station, *Palwal* in the Punjab and was confined to the Bombay Presidency. Even the orders of the local government for the deportation of Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal reached the Deputy Commissioner on the evening of the 9th April. They were to be removed quietly to Dharamshala. These three leaders were in remission on 10th April and these arrests aroused great excitement and kindled the political atmosphere in the province. The people ascertained hartals, organised meeting and took out processions.²⁴

In order to stop all these happenings, on the morning of the 13th April, General Michael O'Dwyer at Amritsar created a proclamation read out by the Naib-Tehsildar. It was proclaimed that nobody was allowed to depart the city while not pass and to not leave house after eight. No procession and gathering was allowed and if someone did so he was to be treated with the force of arms. A counter-proclamation was created to the effect that the meeting would be control in afternoon in the Jallianwala Bagh at 4:30 p.m. Thus, a meeting was held in Jallianwala Bagh as well as twenty thousand men, women and children General trained worker entered the Bagh, ordered his troops to fireside at the unarmed peaceful gathering, going as

²⁴ Report of Disorders Inquiry Committee, Delhi, Superintendent Government Printing Press, 1920, pp. 32-33.

many as 379 dead and 1200 wounded as official records.²⁵

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 13 April 1919 had a great catalytic effect upon the political angle of the people,²⁶ particularly on the women. Earlier women were helping their male counterparts and were functioning on the advice of these men. but currently when they lost their husbands, fathers and sons in this tragedy they got maddened. After the firing a curfew was imposed in the city and this curfew obliged variety of girls in Amritsar to suffer from mental tortures they might not get any help for locating their husbands, sons and other relatives who lay parched, weltering in their own blood and mangled limbs.²⁷ Bibi Attar Kaur, six month pregnant woman experienced this traumatic expertise on the death of her husband Bhag Mal Bhatia. Bhatia also had gone to Jallianwala Bagh and after the firing when his wife visited the Bagh to seek out him; she saw dead bodies of kids and men all over the Bagh and later she saw dead body of her husband and brought it to her home. Another woman Rattan Devi, who had also ventured into the Bagh despite the curfew order and spent the entire night along with her husband's cold head in her lap.²⁸

Instead of having sympathy with the folks of Punjab, martial law was enforced and

²⁵ Manju Verma, *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 35-36.

²⁶ Nina Puri, *Political Elite and Society in the Punjab*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1985, p. 158.

²⁷ Kamlesh Mohan, *Towards Gender History: Images, Identities and Roles of North Indian Women with Special Reference to Panjab*, Aakar Book, New Delhi, 2007, p. 163.

²⁸ Datta, V.N. & S.Settar, *Jallianwala Bagh Massacre*, Pragati Publications, New Delhi, 2000, p. 163.

for long the Punjab was virtually brings to a halt from the rest of the globe. Law was obligatory from 15 April to June 1919 in Amritsar, Gujranwala, Lahore, Ferozepur, Gurdaspur, Jhelum, Ludhiana, Rawalpindi, Rohtak, Sialkot, and Gujarat, Hoshiarpur, Lyallpur and different districts in Punjab. The intention behind this married law was not solely gruelling the alleged rioters however conjointly the political agitators. All sort of atrocities were done on the inhabitants and ladies were conjointly directly and indirectly affected. 'In Amritsar the innocent men and women were made to crawl like worms on their bellies.'²⁹ Public whacking was done. Even the innocent girls were humiliated.

Thus the Rowlatt agitation disturbed the general public mind and shook public confidence in the sensible will of the government. Additional, Jallianwala Bagh massacre and therefore the law acted as a stimulator catalyst of women consciousness in Punjab and in the whole of India. This incident intended girls of Punjab to participate directly in the nationalist struggle for freedom. Girls got active in the Non-cooperation movement of Gandhi from 1920-22 on his call.

Later the incidents of 1919 in Punjab led the government to announce Hunter Committee in reference to the Punjab government's behaviour underneath the law. However this committee was boycotted by the peoples and therefore the leaders of India. Therefore it was determined to appoint a non-official Inquiry Committee, to carry virtually a parallel inquiry on the behalf of Indian

²⁹ Lloyd's, Nick, *The Amritsar Massacre: The Untold Story of One Fateful Day*, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, London, 2011, p. 358.

Nation Congress on ordinal November 1919. Pandit Moti Lal Nehru, M.K. Gandhi, C.R. Das, Abbas Tayabji and M.R. Jayakar were appointed as the commissioners. To organize the report, the commissioners were required to visit Punjab. So during this time M.K. Gandhi created acquaintance with the women of the Punjab and this led the women participation in the next movement of Non-Cooperation. Gandhi visited the province when the ban on his entry was withdrawn in October 1919. He went to all the affected districts. There he met the grieved folks, consoled the women over the death of their kith and kin in the completely different tragedies of Punjab and appealed to all the women to adopt Swadeshi; he felt satisfaction over their contribution to the spinning-wheel.³⁰ During this visit, the wives of Dr. Kitchlew, Dr. Satyapal and Diwan Mangalsen of Gujranwala met him.³¹ At Lahore he stayed at Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhary's (who was in jail at that time) house and his mate Sarla Devi Chaudhurani acted as a perfect hostess. She travelled with him extensively and was the first to use textile saree as a Swadeshi message given to women by Gandhi.³² In the mean whereas, the Khilafat Question arose out of the Muslim's anger at the cruel treatment towards Turkey by the allied powers once the war. Turkey was unfortunate of her imperial territories some of that were

regarded as sacred by the Indian Muslims. These Indian Muslims protested against this action of the British Government and determined to support Indian National Congress in any agitation against the government.³³ The All India National Congress Session was command in the last week of December 1919 and there Punjab authorities and Khilafat question were mentioned and criticized.³⁴ Therefore by persistent cultivation of Hindu- Muslim unity and incorporation of Khilafat, Punjab grievances and Swaraj into his political creed,³⁵ M.K. Gandhi on 1st August 1920 gave the signal for the non-cooperation campaign. Underneath this campaign, people were asked to boycott the law courts, government schools; to purchase solely swadeshi goods especially cloth; to abstain from liquor and intoxicating medication. An outsized variety of Punjabi women conjointly participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi's non-violent programme of spinning-weaving, khadi, boycott of foreign cloth, removal of untouchability and promotion of communal harmony gave women huge opportunities to indicate their calibre.³⁶ In April 1920, a gathering of the Punjab Provincial Conference was command at Jalandhar. Concerning 1600 delegates, as well as 150 women delegates attended the session. Kumari Lajjawati (Principal of Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jullundur) was conjointly one among the delegates and praised the participation of women in the

³⁰ Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 16, and pp. 328-32.

³¹ Manju Verma, *the Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 39-40.

³² Girja Kumar, *Brahmacharya Gandhi and His Women Associates*, Vitasta Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 217-218.

³³ Darshan Lal Chaudhary, *Violence in the Freedom Movement of Punjab*, B.R. Publishers, New Delhi, 1953, p. 76.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 77.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 78.

³⁶ Manju Verma, *the Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 48.

Conference.³⁷ Lahore was the centre of all the political meetings organized during the Movement. After the 1 August 1920, the women in Punjab organized a gathering at Lahore underneath the position of Lado Rani Zutshi. Here numerous different women from completely different parts of Punjab gave their speeches concerning the political conditions of the country. Sarla Devi Chaudhurani, a fervent follower of Mahatma Gandhi established '*A Swaraj Ashram*' in her home at Lahore.³⁸ Here she worked on the thought of Swadeshism and inspired girls to create textile cloth and propagated for Swaraj.

From 1921 to 1922 the mate of Duni Chand of Lahore, Kumari Lajjawati, Shrimati Parbati Devi (daughter of Lala Lajpat Rai) and Shrimati Puran Devi (wife of Thakur Dass) all appeared on the general public platform. The first activities of these women were more or less confined to processions, national songs, the Swadeshi campaign and meetings.³⁹ Efforts were created to enlist more and more lady volunteers for the information work. Separate Women Congress Committees were organized at some places in the Punjab with the efforts of women leadership. The women leaders extensively toured the province on with the other members and delivered speeches. This led to the formation of assorted Congress Committees and women started becoming their members. In May 1921, five hundred women registered themselves as the members of the Rawalpindi Congress Committee. In the finish of the month, the amount of members rose to 3500 as well

as thousand women members. Thus, it can be seen that girls were becoming active day by day in a very single month in a very district wherever thousand women enlisted in the Congress Committee. These committee members delivered their speeches at everyplace in the Punjab. Prem Kaur of Ambala suspects the government of tempering with faith. Shrimati Roop Kaur of Amritsar created offensive speeches in the Rohtak district. At Lyallpur, Mussammat Maqbul Muhammadans (wife of Siraj-ud-din) spoke against the government and their policies. At Gurdaspur, Shrimati Bhagmati Devi distinguished herself by the violent language and inspired her fellow sisters to fight against the foreign government.⁴⁰ The year 1921 brought no respite from the political agitation. The Congress Movement with its programme of Non-Cooperation, and establishment of Congress Committees was pushed on smartly, especially by means of public meeting and processions. 'The speeches were entirely unrestrained'. The year 1922 of the Non-Cooperation Movement witnessed rather more political activity of the people in the Province. There had been a number of demonstrations in virtually every district.

In January 1922, Smt. Parmeshwari Devi, mate of Chaudhary Ake Singh of Bhiwani, highlighted the importance of Swadeshi before the women in a very public meeting and arranged a procession.⁴¹ Women were conjointly engaged in picketing of foreign cloth outlets and liquor outlets to stop the sale of foreign cloth by the dealers and to stop the use of liquor. The picketing was

³⁷ The Tribune, Lahore, April 6, 1920, p. 3.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

³⁹ The Tribune, June 23, 1921, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ganda Singh Collection, File No. 493, p. 62.

⁴¹ The Tribune, January 7, 1922, p. 6.

entrusted to the ladies by Gandhi and no buyer dared to return close to the outlets wherever women picketers were seen and even the shopkeepers used to behave well with the women volunteers. The shopkeepers invariably compromised with true. 'On 17th Jan 1922 Kumari Lajjavati of Jalandhar did picketing in Lahore escorted by the other women volunteers and it was a complete success.' The Punjab Provincial Congress Committee in its meeting command on 18 January 1922 placed on record its sincere appreciation of the tremendous impetus that the province had received from the noble and inspiring participation of ladies of the Punjab in India's battle for freedom.⁴² When the movement was at its peak, Gandhi had to retrace his steps at Bardoli on 11-12 February, 1922, as a result of the eruption of violence at Chaura Chauri (UP) on 4 February 1922. The movement was withdrawn by Gandhi, however still the ladies of Punjab were busy in all the activities.

On 22 October 1922 Shrimati Parbati of Kamalia in Gurdaspur said, "No one ought to adapt the orders of white devils (Britishers) and that all persons higher than the age of eighteen ought to join the Congress." And for this she was sentenced at Meerut on 4 December 1922. Kasturba Gandhi (wife of Gandhi) visited Punjab in 1922 and Bi Amman (mother of Ali brothers) conjointly created an in depth tour in the months of August and September, 1922.⁴³ During the decade 1921-30, the women of Punjab participated in the non-violent Non-Cooperation

Movement (1920-22). They held the meetings, led the processions, boycotted foreign goods, adopted the slaying of Swadeshi and indulged in the picketing of foreign cloth shops and liquor outlets. This participation of women in massive numbers proved beyond doubt, the freedom movement was in the process of changing into a mass movement. 'Sarla Devi Chaudhurani, Smt. Annapurna Devi of Kamalia, Smt. Puran Devi, Smt. Gauran Devi, Mrs. Duni Chand, Smt. Amar Kaur, Smt. Luxmi Arya, Smt. Pushpa Gujral, Smt. Chand Bai, Smt. Lal Devi, Kumari Lajjavati and Lado Rani Zutshi were the names of few women who participated during this movement. This participation was a sort of coaching programme for the long run nonviolent resistance programmes of 1930-34 and 1940-42.'⁴⁴ Even once the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922, women were still engaged in the constructive programme of Gandhi. The 1930's saw the freedom struggle take many steps forward. The decade began with the direct action movement; it over with the start of the second warfare and therefore the Congress ministries in the Provinces resigning as a protest against India being involved in the War while not her consent.⁴⁵ Gandhi launched a movement in 1930 that attracted large number of women. Women participation in Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-32 differed quantitatively and qualitatively from their involvement in the early 1920s and won them a place in history. It was the women organizations and networks, developed

⁴² The Tribune, January 7, 1922, p. 5.

⁴³ Ganda Singh Collection, File Number 493, pp. 61-63.

⁴⁴ Manju Verma, *the Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 60-61.

⁴⁵ Bipan Chandra & Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1927, p. 148.

between 1925 and 1930, that laid the ground work for his or her positive reaction to Gandhi's call.⁴⁶

The year 1930 began with the pledge of independence and in March, Gandhi opened the new part of nonviolent resistance by saying that he would break the salt law.⁴⁷ The failure of the government to take up the Nehru Report and note of the demand of the people within the stipulated amount forced the Indian National Congress to proceed with its plans of launching nonviolent resistance as had been determined at its session in December 1928 at Calcutta.⁴⁸

So, in the annual session of the Congress at Lahore in the last week of December 1929,⁴⁹ the resolution of complete Independence or Poorna Swarajya for India was adopted. The Congress conjointly determined to launch the programme of direct action as well as non-payment of taxes. This session was attended by 400 delegates from Punjab out of 2500.⁵⁰ Shiama Zutshi (daughter of Lado Rani Zutshi), Miss Shakuntala, Swadesh and Adarsh (daughters of Lala Pindi Dass), Jaya (daughter of Badri Dass), Kumari Lajjawati (Principal of Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar), Lado Rani Zutshi, Kumari Shiv Dua, Pushpa Gujral and Sarla Devi Chaudhurani were

⁴⁶ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, Chronicle Books, New Delhi, 2005, p. 44.

⁴⁷ Aparna Basu, *The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom*, Vikas Publishers, New Delhi, 1976, p.23.

⁴⁸ Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1968, p. 167.

⁴⁹ The Tribune, Lahore, 4 January, 1930, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Manju Verma, *the Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 71.

some prominent women to attend this session.⁵¹ 26th Jan 1930 was celebrated as an Independence Day all over India. Many persons in Lahore hoisted national flags over homes and many of them had illuminations at night. Processions were taken out and women conjointly joined these processions. Smt. Annapurna Devi (daughter of Lala Lajpat Rai) alongside different prominent Congress workers of Punjab scans out the Independence resolutions.⁵²

Gandhi started his historic march to Dandi from Sabarmati Ashram on 12 March, 1930 and formally inaugurated the civil disobedience campaign. As a result of breaking the salt law he was arrested on the 6th April.⁵³ In the Young India on 30 April, Gandhi had appealed to Indian women to require up spinning yarn on the Charkha and to return out of their unit seclusion and picket shops selling foreign goods or liquor and Government institutions.⁵⁴ At first he didn't want women to participate as he thought they would complicate matters but later they were allowable to require part altogether phases of the campaign.

In Punjab the women inaugurated the movement by disposing of a processions, meetings, picketing and prabhat pheries. In Lahore 5000 women took out a procession. The life and soul of the movement was Mrs. Lado patrician Zutshi, Parvati Devi, Smt. Kartar Kaur, Atma

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 70.

⁵² The Tribune, 28 January, 1930, p.1.

⁵³ Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1968, p. 167.

⁵⁴ Bipan Chandra & Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1927, pp. 160-161.

Devi and many others.⁵⁵ On 23rd March 1930, thousands of women clad in khaddar assembled in Sari Sehglan, Rawalpindi where a gathering of women was held under the presidentship of Shrimati Gopal Devi (Mrs. Gurdasram Sahani). These women took vow solemnly declaring to not buy foreign textile in future.⁵⁶ On 30th March 1930, Kumari Lajjawati delivered a lecture during the 'All India Martyr's Day' celebration at Lahore and appealed to everybody, particularly ladies to affix the non-violent struggle.⁵⁷ The Satyagraha campaign against the salt law was inaugurated at Jullundur on 17 April 1930 by Raizada Hans Raj. A procession consisting four hundred ladies and twenty thousand men marched and then ladies performed Tilak Ceremony and volunteers manufactured salt.⁵⁸ As the women were taking part altogether these activities of the campaign, the government also started sensational these ladies participants. 'In February 1932, eight women as well as Mrs. Hariram (daughter-in-law of Sir Gangaram of Lahore), Mrs. Sahni (of mother Mr. Devraj) and Gyandevi (wife of Mr. Jung Bahadur) were sentenced in Lahore for four months.'⁵⁹ On 20th February, Shrimati Pritamdevi, a distinguished Congress worker was arrested under Section 108 and ordered to furnish two securities amounting to rupees one thousand or bear one year's imprisonment, but she preferred jail. 1st March 1932 witnessed Mrs. Leelavathi

⁵⁵ Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1968, p. 188.

⁵⁶ The Tribune, 26 March, 1930, p. 4.

⁵⁷ The Tribune, April, 1930, p. 3.

⁵⁸ The Tribune, 19, April, 1930, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Nipendra Nath Mitra (e. d.), *The Indian Annual Register*, vol. I, Jan-June, 1932, Calcutta, The Annual Register Office, 1932, p. 9.

Munshi's imprisonment to one year and rupees three hundred fine. At Lahore Miss Zutshi, dictator of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee, Miss Satyavati, Mrs. Pindidass, Mrs. Narayan, Mrs. Ganga Ram, Mrs. Tarachand and Mrs. Chatterjee were arrested whereas walk in a procession to celebrate the inaugural day of the "Gandhi Week" on 6th April.⁶⁰

During this campaign the women of Punjab were busy in the Salt Satyagraha; boycott of foreign garments, articles and liquor; picketing of foreign textile shops; picketing of non secular places; picketing of Legislative Assembly; picketing of elections; picketing of Educational institutions and worked for Swadeshi. 'One of the most significant features of four years 1930 to 1934 was the participation of women in the nationalist movement on an unexampled scale.'⁶¹ Hoards of girls poured out of their homes. Women of all categories and castes, high and low gave their support to the national movement. The processions taken by the women, their hardworking picketing of cloth and liquor retailers and their persuasive appeals for swadeshi are even today marvelled at.⁶²

The next few years of 1940s witnessed the third vital campaign of M.K. Gandhi – The Individual Satyagraha and therefore the Quit India Movement from 1940-1944. In these two movements, again a large number of Punjabi women participated and helped their male counterparts.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 17.

⁶¹ Vijay Agnew, *Elite women in Indian Politics*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, p. 48

⁶² Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 70.

Throughout now, the Second World War began from 1939-1945 and it had a decisive impact on the political state of affairs of India. Before Second World War, under the Government Act of 1935, all the political parties of Bharat in the different provinces swept into power and in 1937 they fashioned their ministries in the provinces with Indian National Congress in majority. 'But these Congress Ministries were to resign in 1939 after two years on the issue of not consulting them when government the joined the war.'⁶³

The war was declared on 3 September 1939. After resignations, the working committee of Indian National Congress demanded from the government a transparent declaration of its war objectives and a promise for independence for India. However, these demands were rejected so the Congress then decided to propagate against and obstruct individuals from rendering any help in the war effort.⁶⁴

By now women were members and some were even leaders of the students associations, peasant movements and labour unions like Lado Rani Zutshi, Shah Nawaz and others. The presence of women in the various movements of the day was as significant of the anti-British movement throughout the war years as were their election to legislative seats and their appointment to positions of power and authority.⁶⁵ In Punjab Lado Rani Zutshi was the leader of the Students Association of Lahore, Begum Shah of Nawaz and Lekhwati Jain was associated with the

Legislative Council of Punjab. Sarladevi was directly connected with Gandhi's working and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was a vigorous member of All India Women Conference and she perpetually wished her organisation to work for political gains. So in protest against the government, Gandhi launched an Individual Satyagraha in October 1940. It had been to "carry on non-violently and brazenly anti-war propaganda" and "to preach non-cooperation with the government in their war efforts." So Vinoba Bhave opened this campaign on 17 October 1940, throughout that about thirty thousand men and women courted arrest.⁶⁶ Even Gandhi appealed to ladies to participate and he expected a lot of women than men.⁶⁷ In Punjab, Satyagraha was initiated by Mian Iftikhar-ud-din, President, and Punjab Provincial Congress Committee on 25th Nov, 1940 and he went to visit Gandhi in Wardha.⁶⁸ Bibi Raghbir Kaur, member of the law-makers Punjab started Satyagraha on 8th December 1940. Throughout this Satyagraha movement, many men and women were arrested. 'Mrs. Duni Chand, MLA was the lady to be arrested in the Punjab at Lahore on 5 December and she was representing the Lahore women (General) body.'⁶⁹ Another woman Mrs. Bedi, (wife of Mr. B.P.L. Bedi) in Lahore also offered Satyagraha.⁷⁰ Amar Kaur (wife of Mohan Lal advocate of Gurdaspur, who renounced his follow in 1921 and entered public life) offered Satyagraha at Kasur in Lahore district and

⁶³ Ibid, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1968, p. 188.

⁶⁵ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, Chronicle Books, New Delhi, 2005, p. 203.

⁶⁶ Opcit, p. 210.

⁶⁷ The Tribune, 19 Nov, 1940, p. 13.

⁶⁸ The Tribune, 24 Nov, 1940, p. 7.

⁶⁹ The Tribune, 6 Dec, 1940, p. 2.

⁷⁰ The Tribune, 7 Dec, 1940, p. 2.

was arrested and later discharged in Sep 1942.⁷¹

Pushpa Gujral of Jhelum was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment for providing Satyagraha.⁷² Smt. Vidya Kumari (wife of leader Ram Bheja Mal of Lahore), Smt. Parvati Devi of Kamalia, Smt. Kasturi Bai of Rohtak, Smt. Puran Devi and Smt. Savitri Devi of Ludhiana, Chandar Wati of Ferozepur and many others participated in the movement of Individual Satyagraha.⁷³ In the Individual Satyagraha from October 1940 to December 1941, varied ladies offered Satyagraha and were arrested. In the month of February 1941, regarding nine women were arrested at the various places in the province. The number of satyagrahis was increasing on a daily basis. Upto the month of April, the overall strength of the Congress members listed in the Punjab were 1, 13, 277. Among them 4,256 was women Congress members.⁷⁴

Every month range of women was taking permission from Gandhi to participate in the Individual Satyagraha. But the participation of the Punjabi women was restricted as only some women of prominence chosen by Gandhi were given the correct to offer Satyagraha. Like Shanno Devi, Smt. Rameshwari Devi and others were not allowed by Gandhi to court arrest and instead were asked to participate in the constructive programme. Finally on 8th August 1942, the All India Congress Committee in its historic session

at Bombay, legal the “Quit India” resolution of 14th July 1942 passed at Wardha by the Congress working committee by an awesome majority. Gandhi called on all Indians to start to feel that they are free and he asked academics and students to be ready to get out.⁷⁵ Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur at the side of Rameshwari Nehru and Aruna Asaf Ali, representing the All India Women’s conference appealed to the government to settle the matter of India’s political demand of independence and Quit India⁷⁶ and during this Quit India movement of 1942, Shrimati Lajyawati (Mrs. Hemraj), Shrimati Lakshmi Devi (Mrs. Om Prakash Trikha), Smt. Savitri Devi (Mrs. Ram Krishan), who it had been declared held an illustration in Anarkali on 26 August by raising Congress motto and singing national songs were arrested at Lahore by the police whereas they marched with the national flag. Smt. Satyawati (Mrs. Achint Ram) was also there and was arrested at the side of her son and twelve year old girl. Another Congress women worker of Lahore Smt. Parbati Devi was also arrested on same day.⁷⁷ Smt. Rameshwari Nehru, president of the AIWC, president of the Punjab branch of the AIWC, vice chairman of the Punjab Harijan Sewak Sangh was also put into jail on 29 August and she had been appointed as second ‘dictator’ of the Punjab Provincial congress Committee by Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din and later she was discharged on 31 August with restrictions on her movement.

Sucheta Mazumdar Kriplani (born in Ambala, Punjab and was married to

⁷¹ The Tribune, 7 Sep, 1940, p. 7.

⁷² Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1968, p. 221.

⁷³ Manju Verma, *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 122.

⁷⁴ The Tribune, 9 March, 1941, p. 5.

⁷⁵ The Tribune, 9 August, 1942, p. 1.

⁷⁶ The Tribune, 17 August, 1942, p. 8.

⁷⁷ The Tribune, 27 August, 1942, p. 5.

Acharaya Kriplani of Allahabad) was chosen to prepare women wing of the Indian National Congress in 1940. The department won't to work for raising the political consciousness of girls and determine Congress with social amendment that benefited women.⁷⁸ A faithful lieutenant of Gandhiji, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur⁷⁹ took up the task of the uplift of women on her shoulders and was terribly active throughout the Quit India movement in 1942.⁸⁰ She led processions day after day. One procession was subjected to un pitying lathi charge in Shimla. From 9 August to 16 August the processions led by her were subject to lathi charge fifteen times.⁸¹ The women of Punjab unionised spontaneous hartals and demonstrations in many cities of the province to protest against the Britishers.

⁷⁸ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, Chronicle Books, New Delhi, 2005, p. 208.

⁷⁹ The Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was born on 2 February 1889 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (then United Provinces), India. She and her seven brothers were the eight children of Rājā Harnam Singh, a member of the princely family of *Kapurthala* in the Punjab region and his wife Rāni Harnām Singh, who was the daughter of a Bengali Presbyterian mother and an Anglican father. She had her early education in Sherborne School for Girls in Dorset, England, and had her college education at Oxford University. After completing her education in England, she returned to India. She was the health minister in the Indian Cabinet for ten years after India's independence from the British Raj in 1947. She was an eminent Gandhian, a freedom fighter, and a social activist. She co-founded the All India Women's Conference in 1927, became its secretary in 1930, and president in 1933.

⁸⁰ P. Hayer, *Personalities : A Comprehensive and Authentic Biographical Dictionary of Men who Matter in India*, Arunam and Sheel Publishers, New Delhi, p. 25.

⁸¹ Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1968, p. 218.

The young women were also not insulation behind. In Amritsar, about three dozen young college women hoisted the tri-colour flag as a mark of '*Gandhi Jayanti*' celebrations in Chowk Phuharawala on October 2, 1942. They also took out a procession but the police reached there and to disperse the gang, the police lathi charged and removed the ladies to some unknown place. The arrested women were let off after few hours of detention.⁸² During this movement everyday hartals were ascertained and educational institutions were closed. Processions were unionised despite preventative orders of the government. Woman students took a prominent part in these processions and in distribution of anti-government literature. Some of the women even started working secretly in the underground organisations to evade police arrests. 'Smt. Subhadra Joshi⁸³ was one in all them who undertook the work of editing a cyclostyled paper *Hamara Sangram*. This paper was revealed in Hindi from Delhi. She become target of the C.I.D. officials and was later arrested. Luxmi Arya of Rohtak was also

⁸² The Tribune, October, 1942, p. 9.

⁸³ Subhadra Joshi (*nee* Datta) (March 23, 1919 – October 30, 2003) was a noted Indian freedom activist, politician and parliamentarian from Indian National Congress. She took part in the 1942 Quit India movement. Attracted by the ideals of Gandhiji, she visited his Ashram at Wardha when she was studying in Lahore. As a Student she took part in the Quit India Movement in 1942 and worked with Aruna Asaf Ali. During this time, she relocated to Delhi where she went underground and edited a journal '*Hamara Sangram*'. She was arrested and after serving time at the Lahore Women Central Jail, she started working among industrial workers. During the communal riots that ensued in the wake of Partition she set up a peace volunteer organization, '*Shanti Dal*' which became a powerful anti communal force during those troubled times. She also organized rehabilitation of evacuees from Pakistan.

concerned in the underground activities. She joined these underground political activities after taking leave from her school. She went from place to place and carried the message of the Congress from door to door hiding at her personal risk to avoid detention, so that movement maybe kept alive outside the jail among the masses.⁸⁴

The political active ladies leaders were arrested and therefore the treatment allotted to them was vindictive and far from satisfactory. Pattabhi Sitaramayya commented, "The treatment with ladies was not smart and this can be a tale that the state would always remember."⁸⁵ Rajkumari Amrit Kaur when arrested at Kalka for leading processions was kept in Ambala Jail like an ordinary prisoner for a month. She was not allowed holding her baggage of garments. There was no arrangement for bathing and food given was bad, unclean and uncooked. Sometimes women were also kept in solitary confinements to pressurize them to go away the movement. Smt. Shakuntala Rishi was kept in Gurdaspur jail in a solitary cell for quite some time. Their relatives were not allowed to meet them and at the time of ill health, women were not given correct medical facilities. Inadequate medical treatment and bad food of the jail affected the health of girl's political prisoners.

Thus, throughout the Individual Satyagraha and Quit India Movement, ladies from every nook and corner of the

Punjab participated. Young students did not lag behind. They courted arrests and after they were in jails they merrily accepted all the harsh treatment of the Britishers. In this campaign Gandhi asked ladies to use the previously sanctioned techniques of salt creating, boycotts of courts and schools, picketing textile and liquor retailers and non-payment of taxes. People were asked to court arrests. The movement began in the province with strikes, demonstrations and processions. Women participated in the initial strikes and demonstrations in cities, were among the radical students who unionised peasant movements, and when protest was suppressed, joined the secret underground movements.

Hence, the participation of women of Punjab in the nationalist movement succeeded step by step from 1901-10, 1911-20, 1921-30, 1931-40 and 1941-47. In 1901-10, political upheavals in the province of Bengal affected Punjabi women and few women showed their sympathy with the Bengali individuals. The decade 1911-20 was the most important decade as the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy and therefore the martial law of 1919 acted as a catalyst for making ladies consciousness for fighting for the freedom of India. Then these women victims and alternative sympathetic women directly jumped into the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920. The decade 1921-30, witnessed the direct involvement of girls of Punjab in the freedom struggle and these women came into the contact of M.K. Gandhi. The decade 1931-40 was the period of direct action and women of Punjab region did not sit back at their homes and got active in disobeying the

⁸⁴ Manju Verma, *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 219.

⁸⁵ Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, vol. II, S. Chand and Company, New Delhi, 1969, p. 761.

government by following the non-violent ways of Gandhi from 1930-34. The last seven years from 1941 to 47 were those when the women of Punjab province came forward and fought aboard men and suffered the same consequences as the men suffered. These activist ladies were so trapped in this struggle, that they unheeded gender issues or put them aside until independence had been achieved and in the finish in 1947 after the accomplishment of independence, the women of Punjab were given credit to their deeds as Rajkumari Amrit Kaur of Kapurthala⁸⁶, Punjab was appointed as the first women health minister of the free independent India.

⁸⁶ She was from the Royal family of Kapurthala state in the Punjab. Educated in England, but on returning to India came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and became one his close followers and life-long disciples. Remained secretary of All- India women's conference in 1930, and from 1931 to 1933, served as the president of the women's association. In 1932 she gave evidence before the Lothian committee on Indian franchise and later, as a member of the delegation of women's organization, she testified before the joint select committee of parliament on Indian constitutional reforms. Become president of all- India women's conference in 1938. Served as a secretary of Mahatma Gandhi for sixteen years. She was the first woman to be appointed a member of the advisory board o education, but resigned in august 1942. Attended the UNSECO conference in London in 1945 and in Paris in 1946 as a member of the Board of trustees of the all-India spinners association. After independence, in 1947, she was appointed as the first minister of health of the government of India. From AIWC At A Glance The First Twenty Five Years 1927-52, p.9.

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